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NSCG Newsletter

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Insect Pests in Museums

11-12 March 2003

The Natural History Museum

Insect Pests in Museums, a 2-day course by David Pinniger, of interest to all those with responsibility for Natural History specimens, Ethnographic collections, folk collections, textiles etc.

Including: pest monitoring and control, and pest management.

Further details from:

Sharing Our Skills, Education Unit (Administration), Communications and Development, The Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD.

The Museums Association is the leading organisation in the UK that provides ethical guidance for museums, galleries and the people who work in them. It does so through an ethics committee, made up of senior museum professionals. The ethics committee publishes the Code of Ethics booklet. The code advises on correct behaviour in employer/employee situations and provide guidance on responsibilities to the public, to collections and to colleagues.

The committee also researches and publishes guidelines on more specific ethical issues such as access, acquisition & disposal of museum objects, trading and commercial activities.

There are a number of exciting MA ethics sessions taking place soon. These include free ethical problem solving seminars and a series of launches for the forthcoming revised Codes of Ethics.

<http://www.museumsassociation.org/>

Papers presented at the 2002 Conference

Part II - The Theories Of Moving or 'Ideas & Implications'

The Impact Of Building Development Projects On Collections Care
C. Proudlove, Head Of Conservation, Castle Museum

In the early 1990s, before HLF started funding big projects, NMAS built an innovative large objects store at Gressenhall with some support from MGC. This had been planned by a staff team and was generally successful (although not without its problems, some of which were explained on a site visit later in the day).

Political forces will strongly influence the content of larger capital projects such as Norwich Castle and Gressenhall Museum and it can be difficult for staff to counter them. Currently access and social inclusion are emphasised and there may be an emphasis on exciting display experiences intended to increase visitor numbers, but the Heritage Lottery Fund also encourages sound policies for collections care and management. Moving collections is a golden opportunity for condition assessment and improving documentation, but this requires careful planning well ahead of the actual building work. Unfortunately, pressures on core staff have made it difficult for them to contribute, especially as curatorial and conservation jobs have been disappearing from museums in recent years. Tackling a major project generates a massive amount of work, and this certainly caused distress for staff in NMAS tackling both projects.

Important issues to watch out for if your organisation is planning a major capital project:

- We are the collections champions, there are less of us than before, we need to work together and avoid squabbling between departments. But we can't do everything we would like and will have to compromise.
- Try to get in and make your contribution at the earliest possible stage - the whole staff should be involved in planning the project.
- Time and resource planning is crucial, or you won't have the person-power to do all necessary things as well as you want. Example: specification of storage systems.
- Take a risk management view of collections care rather than pursuing rigid standards which may not be right for your situation.
- The allocation of space is of crucial importance, in both new and refurbished buildings.
- Be reasonable.

- Curators should be reasonable too: can you really afford to keep everything?
- Involve yourself in planning collections moves and temporary locations – you will probably know more about this than anyone else.
- It can be very sad if the museum team has to fight hard for what should be obvious, but try your best – its better than whingeing later.

Cathy is completing a study of recent capital projects in local authority museums.

She would be delighted to hear from anyone who has been involved in one of these projects and is willing to share their experience.

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Moving the Norwich Castle Collections

Martin Warren, Collections Manager, Castle Museum

The redevelopment of the Castle Museum in 1999 -2001 was an enormous undertaking. Planning had begun several years beforehand but things did not really get moving until a few months before the builders moved in. Assessments had been done on the space requirements of the collections and the packing methods but it was quite late in the day that the decision was made to decant the entire collection to temporary storage off site. This strident advice came from a consultant brought in to revive the project when the regular staff was in danger of being overwhelmed by the sheer scale and pace of the project. It was his emphatic advice that the Castle would become a building site, dirty, dangerous and distinctly out of our control and there was no way he could allow collections to remain in the building. Building contractors, nice chaps though they may be, are no respecters of delicate and valuable collections. They also have the ability to go anywhere they choose when your back is turned, in order to do their jobs, so there could be no secure parts of the building that could be used as temporary storage.

How true that advice proved to be.

We were presented with a short-list of properties available in the city and came to a decision on the basis of a long series of factors, which were weighted for importance and scored for each property. The property with the highest score was in fact a pair of fairly new industrial warehouses on a well-managed estate. The fact there were two small ones rather than one good one was attractive, as we expected there to be a long term need for some smaller scale store when the main project

was over and in fact we still rent one of them today.

The physical security of the properties was upgraded with new doors, bars at windows and new locks throughout. A fire detection and intruder alarm system (seismic and PIR) was put in, and during the phase when the highest values were in the building the insurers insisted on 24-hour guards as well. It obviously worked because we had no attempts at burglary, and we are very grateful for the guards who alerted us when a down-pipe became blocked in a cloudburst and we were able to avoid a disastrous flood.

One of the stores (which we still inhabit) was equipped with two-storey pallet racking from Stortech. We didn't actually use it for storing on pallets but instead it gave us two levels of giant adjustable shelves that we could stack by hand with geology, decorative art, fine art and natural history. It has proved to be very versatile. No items were stored on the ground (for fear of water damage should there be a flood). Anything not on racking was placed on pallets.

The climate in the temporary store was controlled in two ways. One of the stores was already fitted with a large gas-fired heater unit. This was coupled to a humidistat and only switched on when the humidity climbed to unacceptable levels. The other store was unheated and was used to store mainly bulk archaeology and large paintings. The paintings were protected from extremes by placing them in racks constructed from spare Handy Angle and then enveloping the whole length of racking in polythene to form a tunnel. A spare dehumidifier was brought from another store and used to condition the air flowing through the tunnel. The machine was not big enough to manage the entire volume of the store but it did a good job on the contents of the poly-tunnel.

The packing of the entire collections required the recruitment of additional staff with appropriate skills. We had small teams working in many areas of the building. As this was going on while the museum was open to the public we created temporary packing areas by erecting secure screens with locking doors in the galleries. A closed circuit TV was also installed at the museum entrance to discourage anyone was removing things they shouldn't.

Wherever possible items destined for permanent storage was packed into their long-term containers. Natural History for instance was obtaining new steel dust-proof cabinets and so the specimens were wrapped and packed into the new European standard plastic trays that would go in them. Keeper Tony Irwin devised an ingenious method of securing mounted bird specimens. (See Issue 19 – Ed.)

For items requiring temporary storage we employed a variety of packing materi-